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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 005583

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR WHA/CCA, DRL AND EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2013

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [CU](#) [IT](#) [HUMAN RIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: CUBAN CHARM OFFENSIVE: USUAL AUDIENCE PRIMED, BUT
NO PERFORMERS YET

REF: STATE 334414

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM EMIL SKODON, REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) WE REVIEWED DEVELOPMENTS IN CUBA WITH MFA UNDER SECRETARY MARGHERITA BONIVER DECEMBER 9 IN THE COURSE OF A WIDE-RANGING CONVERSATION, NOTING THAT WE'D SEEN SOME INDICATIONS THAT CASTRO WAS POISED TO LAUNCH A NEW CHARM OFFENSIVE. BONIVER SAID SHE'D SEEN NO INDICATION OF ANY PROPOSED VISITS BY CUBAN OFFICIALS BUT ACKNOWLEDGED COLLEAGUES IN THE MFA'S WESTERN HEMISPHERE DIVISION WOULDN'T NECESSARILY THINK TO ALERT HER TO SUCH A VISIT. STILL, SHE WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF A CUBAN DELEGATION INCLUDED A STOP IN ITALY ON ANY SWING THROUGH EUROPE. DESPITE LAST SUMMER'S DIPLOMATIC DUST-UP, AND THE CUBAN CRACKDOWN THAT PRECIPITATED IT, CASTRO STILL HAD MANY ADMIRERS AMONG THE ITALIAN LEFT. MEMORIES OF THE SPRING CRACKDOWN AND EXECUTIONS WERE FADING, AND SOME LEFTIST PARLIAMENTARIANS AND COMMENTATORS WERE CLEARLY INCLINED TO REVERT TO OLD HABITS. BONIVER PROMISED TO ALERT US TO ANY PROPOSED VISITS; IN TURN, SHE ASKED US TO PROVIDE ADVANCE WARNING IF WE HEARD A CUBAN DELEGATION WAS CONTEMPLATING A VISIT -- OFFICIAL OR PRIVATE -- TO ITALY.

2. (C) COMMENT: WE DOUBT THE MFA WOULD LOOK FAVORABLY ON AN OFFICIAL CUBAN VISIT ANYTIME SOON, BUT THERE ARE PLENTY OF OTHERS WHO STILL WOULD WELCOME A PRIVATE VISIT. A LONG-STANDING CRITIC OF THE CASTRO REGIME, BONIVER IS PART OF THE REASON THE ITALIAN LEFT FINALLY ACKNOWLEDGED CUBA'S MASSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES LAST SPRING AND CRITICIZED THE CASTRO REGIME. SHE IS CLEARLY PREPARED TO REPRISÉ THAT ROLE, IF NECESSARY, TO TRY TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF ANY "PRIVATE" VISITS.
SEMBLER

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